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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KYIV 000296

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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: YUSHCHENKO NOMINATES OHRYZKO AS FOREIGN
MINISTER

REF: KYIV 223

Classified By: Ambassador for reasons 1.4(a,b,d).

11. (C) Summary. President Yushchenko nominated First Deputy (and currently Acting) Foreign Minister Volodymyr Ohryzko February 5 to replace former FM Tarasyuk, defying general expectations that Deputy Head of the Presidential Secretariat Oleksandr Chaliy would be nominated. Ohryzko's nomination now awaits a Rada (parliament) vote, which could come as early as the Rada's opening session on February 6. Given recent struggles for control of foreign policy between the President, Prime Minister, and the Rada, however, it remains unclear how the ruling coalition will react to the nomination which appears to have been announced without prior coordination with the PM's team. Ohryzko has a reputation as a fervent proponent of NATO and EU integration and an opponent of closer ties with Russia, as well as a micromanager, much like his predecessor. End summary and comment.

Letter of the Law: Handling FM nominations

12. (SBU) In the current legal limbo surrounding the amended constitution and controversial law on the Cabinet of Ministers, published February 2 despite a Presidential claim of veto, the President retains the right to name the Foreign Minister; the Rada then votes on the nomination. According to the constitution, the Rada is under no time limit to vote on the President's nomination, although they could do it as soon as February 6 when the new session begins. In the meantime, Ohryzko will continue as acting minister, as he has since Tarasyuk resigned January 30. (Note: The new CabMin law states that if the President does not make a nomination within 15 days, the Rada majority can do so. However, the constitutionality of that 15-day time limit is dubious. The Rada is scheduled to review several amendments to the CabMin law February 8 and it is possible that the clause could be removed.)

Ohryzko: Not the Name on Everyone's Lips

13. (C) While Ohryzko was mentioned on the short list of possible candidates to replace Tarasyuk, conventional wisdom heavily favored deputy Presidential Secretariat head (and former First Deputy FM) Chaliy. It is not completely clear why Yushchenko nominated Ohryzko instead. On the one hand, Ohryzko is a respected technocrat who is expected to adhere to Yushchenko's policy directives and who has been a helpful and professional embassy contact since his time at the presidential administration in the 1990's. Leading weekly newspaper Dzerkalo Tyzhnya reported that Ohryzko was Tarasyuk's choice as successor, because the two share the same ardent pro-Western policy outlook, including strong support for NATO membership (note: Chaliy has dallied with

advocacy of neutrality. end note). Like Tarasyuk, Ohryzko is reportedly no fan of Russia. At the same time, Ohryzko's seemingly clear affiliation with Tarasyuk and his role in the early December effort to scuttle Yanukovych's trip to the U.S. at the last minute could make him unappealing to the coalition. PM Foreign Policy Adviser Gryshchenko told Ambassador February 5 that the PM's office/Cabinet of Ministers had not been informed ahead of time about the nomination, suggesting the nomination was not part of any deal between President and PM.

14. (C) A Chaliy associate told us last fall that he had come to the Presidential Secretariat with the understanding that eventually he would replace Tarasyuk (reftel). Chaliy was a name that most Regions MPs cited as an acceptable nominee. The Rada comes back into session on February 6 and there have been a number of last minute meetings February 5 as the factions prepare themselves for renewed politicking--it is not yet clear if the timing of the nomination or the choice of Ohryzko is part of this game.

15. (C) In an echo of the December maneuver to scuttle a trip, Kyiv was abuzz February 5 over purported efforts by the MFA to cancel the scheduled February 6 visit of the EU troika, to be led by the German FM. The German Ambassador fingered DFM Veselovskiy a close Tarasyuk associate, as the guilty party. The confusion on the eve of an important visit once again shows the Ukrainian body politic publicly airing its dirty laundry.

Chaliy Speaks: I support the President

16. (C) Late February 5, Chaliy told the Ambassador that he

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supported Yushchenko's choice of Ohryzko as the nominee, noting that this was one of the names suggested by Tarasyuk as a possible successor. Chaliy said that Yushchenko informed Yanukovych of the nomination at a meeting earlier February 5, during which he made clear that there was a connection between successfully amending the CabMin law (along the lines requested by Yushchenko) and his FM nomination. This would be clear once the Rada began discussing possible amendments -- currently on the Rada calendar for February 8, but something that could possibly be discussed earlier. According to Chaliy, CabMin and Presidential Administration experts were working on possible amendments to the CabMin law, in anticipation of a "deal" that could see the CabMin law amended and an agreement on the foreign minister.

17. (C) Embassy Note. Given the weakness of Yushchenko's bargaining position, pushing both for amendments to the CabMin law and approval of his FM candidate, there is another possible presidential scenario. Yushchenko might trade Ohryzko's candidacy to the parliamentary majority in exchange for his amendments to the CabMin law, opening the door (again) to waiting in the wings candidate Chaliy. However, in his conversation with the Ambassador, Chaliy said nothing about his own candidacy, noting only that he supported the President.

Biographic Notes

18. (C) Ohryzko is a career diplomat. Born April 1, 1956, he graduated from Kyiv Shevchenko State University in 1978, majoring in foreign relations and German, immediately joining the (Soviet) Ukrainian Foreign Ministry. He worked on press issues for the first ten years of his service in the MFA. Between 1992-1996, Ohryzko served tours in Germany, Austria, and Germany again. He then ran the Presidential Administration's Foreign Policy Department from 1996 to 1999, sitting in on all meetings that U.S. officials had with President Kuchma, as well as many with National Security and

Defense Council (NSDC) Secretary Horbulin. He served from 1999-2004 as Ukraine's Ambassador to Austria and as Permanent Representative to International Organizations based in Vienna (note: mainly the OSCE). He briefly served as Ambassador at large in the MFA before being named by Tarasyuk as First Deputy Minister in February 2005. Ohryzko has a reputation within the ministry of sharing Tarasyuk's predilection for micromanaging.

19. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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